

Allan Downey, *The Creator's Game: Lacrosse, Identity, and Indigenous Nationhood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018). 346 pp. Paperback \$34.95.

*"Settler society required the practical elimination of the natives in order to establish itself on their territory ... settler society subsequently sought to recuperate indigeneity in order to express its difference, and, accordingly, its independence from the mother country."*¹

The Creator's Game is a historical rendering of lacrosse through a select period of colonization (1860–1990) that aligns with the Iroquois Nationals' 1990 participation in the International lacrosse competitions as Hodinöhsö:ni, a sovereign nation. Through the use of personal narratives, oral history, and archival documents, the author reveals how lacrosse galvanized nationhood and regenerated the cultural identities of Indigenous communities in the face of colonial control. While describing the roots of lacrosse being with Hodinöhsö:ni, Downey clearly shows how the game occurred in many Nations across Turtle Island, paying particular attention to the Skwxwú7mesh Nation.

Skillfully crafting the foundation of his book through an Indigenous theoretical and epistemological lens, Downey weaves the intricate story of how lacrosse, or Tewaá:rathon, came to be established on Turtle Island. Seeking out the story from knowledge holders, Downey shares the Hodinöhsö:ni Creation story and how Sky Woman taught her grandsons the skill of healing and resolving disputes through the Creator's game, lacrosse. At the beginning of each chapter, Downey presents a trickster story where he is able to weave his multiple positionalities, as Indigenous, as part non-Indigenous, as colonized, as decolonized in efforts to show the complexities and contradictions of settler colonialism. Downey then guides the reader through an Indigenous storytelling journey to tell the intricate history of lacrosse for Indigenous peoples and for non-Indigenous peoples. Throughout, Downey precisely shows the settler colonial imperatives of Canada's development.

Downey gives an astute analysis of settler colonialism as it relates to Canadian nationalism and the direct appropriation of lacrosse. During the colonial age, non-Indigenous people sought to establish a newly formed Canadian national identity, as the opening quote from Wolfe attests. Through the process of settler colonialism and upon learning how to play the game from Indigenous peoples, the newly arrived settlers replaced the Indigenous origins of Tewaá:rathon to realize it as a Canadian sport, lacrosse, thereby establishing their unique identity separate from their imperial metropole. To enable a presumed Canadian nationalism, Downey ex-

plains how the colonizers used residential schools to fulfill the logic of erasure¹ of Indigenous peoples and fully appropriated the game. Downey demonstrates that Indigenous peoples have always resisted erasure, and to this end, this book demonstrates the history of resistance and how Indigenous peoples maintained their nationhood through sport.

Through deep connections to Indigenous theoretical knowledge, Downey describes lacrosse as a healing game. Downey shows how the mind is the most important element of the game. One must ensure his mind is “not sick,” or not to think of negative or bad things, as it is the mind that gives direction to the body, to emotions, to one’s wholistic being (mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual). Indeed, “lacrosse is ceremony” (236). Lacrosse is connected to ancestral knowledge stemming from the spirit world, it enlivens Indigenous governance within and between Indigenous sovereign nations, and is a meaningful act of regeneration through sport.

Downey also presents a rare and important analysis of gender and lacrosse. He does not shy away from addressing the complex dynamic between the effects of colonialism, Hodinöhsö:ni Confederation politics, and women’s participation in the sport. Downey’s analysis is timely, relevant, and a useful addition to the emergent Indigenous feminist theorizations of sport.

From an Indigenous context, sport is very much related to one’s wholistic well-being and does not easily conform to Western individualistic notions of sport. Downey showcases that through lacrosse, Indigenous nations have been critically involved in the development of sport in Canada. In fact, Indigenous nations ushered in the very first organized sport in what we now call Canada.

There is very little Indigenous-led and centred sport scholarship in Canada. Being the first in-depth study of an Indigenous sport from an Indigenous scholar, the Creator’s Game is a necessary read for scholars in sport, history, Indigenous health, and Indigenous studies. This book is a demonstrable act of generosity, kindness, and enactment of sovereignty; it shows how an Indigenous sport had the power and influence to restore cultural identities and sovereignties despite the concerted efforts of settler colonial erasure.

Tricia McGuire-Adams
University of Ottawa

¹ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” in *Journal of Genocide Research* vol. 8, no.4 (2006): 389.